Group decision making *Continued from page 4*

against, you cannot actually say anything about the success of an activity or how to manage it for greater success.

Practical Tip: When your group decides on a new activity or policy, decide how you will know if it is successful. Set a goal. Be specific. Write it in such a way that you will be able to know if you achieved it. If possible, state the goal relative to the performance of other similar groups or activities, or relative to your own group's past performance.

Measuring progress not only helps you manage future activities, it encourages better performance.

Decide how to decide

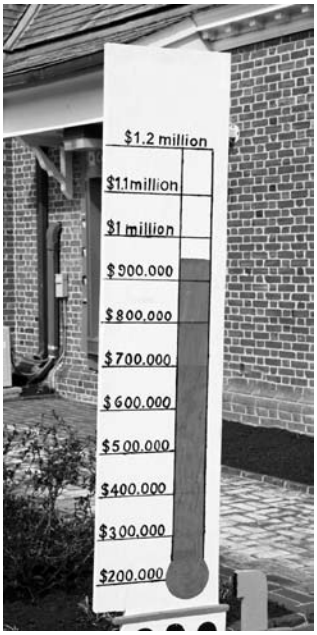
In principle, when parties cannot agree on an issue, the next peaceful step is for them to decide how they are going to decide the issue. For instance, "We can't agree on the floor plan for the new building, so we're going to spend time on this at our next meeting, hear both sides, and vote. Is that okay with everyone?" If everyone can agree on how the thorny issue will be decided, that's progress toward agreement. When we send something to a committee or say something like, "Let's ask Louise and let her decide," we are making a decision about how to decide.

When diplomats or politicians spend time on meeting arrangements, seating plans, and the details of meeting agendas—the conditions under which the parties agree to meet—they are really deciding how they will decide. They are building agreement.

Practical Tip: When it seems like you are stuck and cannot decide something, at least decide how you will decide. Name a next step that moves you in the direction of eventual agreement. Make a plan for a future discussion and vote, send it to a small group or committee with a specific charge, or name a third-party decider.

To learn more about good group decision making, see the following sources for this article:

- Freshley, Craig. "The Wisdom of Group Decisions". Good Group Decisions: Brunswick, Maine. 2010.
- http://www.goodgroupdecisions.com.



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Groups make good decisions when they have clearly-articulated and tracked goals, much like you see in fund-raising campaigns.

MANAGEMENT

It is Rare... "State of Good Repair"

By John Elias

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After 10 years Metro has seen its maintenance and replacement part costs become more predictable and ... buses last longer and cost less to maintain.

Maintaining transit vehicles in a State of Good Repair (SGR) has become a major initiative for the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). High-publicity rail accidents and increases in maintenance expense brought the state of our nation's transit vehicles into the news in the past year. While FTA efforts for SGR in the rail sector get most of the publicity, the agency is also pursuing SGR initiatives in small urban and rural transit. Research into SGR and the experience of some forward-thinking transit agencies has shown that preventative maintenance can improve fleet SGR, level maintenance costs over time, and improve efficiency while lengthening the service life of vehicles.

In response to concerns about safety and efficiency, the Federal Transit Administration emphasizes State of Good Repair in its 2010 formula and discretionary grant funding programs. FTA recently announced an additional $775 million in unallocated discretionary 5309 Bus and Bus Facilities grants to support State of Good Repair.

Learning from success

FTA Formula Funds can have a dramatic effect on SGR efforts. Replacing old buses and vans that have exceeded

useful life with new rolling stock brings antiquated fleets to the state of the art in efficiency and safety. New rolling stock can serve five times as many miles between breakdowns as older buses. But which agencies deserve the limited funds?

The State of Iowa developed a comprehensive vehicle scoring system to allocate statewide funds for bus replacement as part of its Public Transit Management System (PTMS). A task force ranked each of the more than 1,600 transit vehicles across the state. The task force rejected bus condition as a standard in favor of vehicle miles and age to establish a "useful life" for each vehicle; for example, seven years and 200,000 miles for body-on-chassis buses. Each vehicle is then assigned one point for every 3,500 miles above its useful life mileage and another point for each month over its useful life age. Through its scoring, Iowa DOT gains a better understanding of the state of vehicles and can make informed decisions about where to allocate Transportation Improvement Funds for bus replacement.

By focusing on scheduled parts replacement, parts inventory staff developed a predictable budget and maintenance staff no longer had to wait for parts to be delivered.

In 2000, St. Louis's Metro Transit recognized that its response to maintenance costs and worker/customer satisfaction needed a new approach. At that time fleet maintenance focused on responding to problems and vehicles were operated until they failed. Maintenance times were long and costs were high. To address these inefficiencies, Metro Maintenance examined its policies and also the suggested maintenance for each vehicle's manufacturer. Metro decided to focus on a Life Cycle approach with mandatory maintenance at scheduled intervals for all its paratransit vans, buses and light rail cars. After 10 years Metro has seen its maintenance and replacement part costs become more predictable, and has increased the length of vehicle useful life and improved maintenance productivity. Buses last longer and cost less to maintain through Life Cycle preventative maintenance.

Steps toward a State of Good Repair

Transit managers who wish to pursue Life Cycle Maintenance should:
- Identify vehicle manufacturer service requirements.
- Create an schedule matrix for tune-ups, drive train and all maintenance.
- Establish quality check points in between scheduled maintenance.
- Establish mechanic buy-in.
- Perform maintenance regardless of need.

Steps for transit managers

Life Cycle preventative maintenance requires constant attention and monitoring. St. Louis Metro realized early that preventative maintenance can save money by reducing vehicle down time while increasing technician efficiency versus reactive maintenance. The Metro's Life Cycle approach includes pre-programmed tune-ups and minor scheduled maintenance at 50,000 mile intervals and comprehensive body and minor drive train scheduled repairs at 100,000 mile intervals whether the parts require replacement or not. By focusing on scheduled part replacement, parts inventory staff developed a predictable budget and maintenance staff no longer had to wait for parts to be delivered, speeding repair times. The parts were already waiting when the bus arrived for its scheduled maintenance.

One crucial element of the Metro maintenance plan was mechanic buy-in. Maintenance staff worked hard to ensure mechanics understood preventative maintenance goals and were on board with the new policies.

Metro found that by focusing on State of Good Repair it was able to increase the service life of its vehicles while maintaining safe and efficient service at lower, more predictable costs. FTA funding may provide an incentive to replace transit vehicles with new, safer buses. A vigilant Life Cycle approach to bus maintenance can ensure buses, both new and old, maintain a State of Good Repair.

Sources

- Presentation: Carl Thiessen, St. Louis Metro. FTA Region VII training session March, 2010.
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- State of Good Repair Roundtable: http://www.fta.dot.gov/funding/about_FTA_10440.html.